

COLONIAL MINES BATHHOUSE
(Franklin Rod & Gun Club)
H.C. Frick Coke Company
Smock
Fayette County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-365

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Smock, Fayette County, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: ca. 1910

Present Owner: Franklin Rod and Gun Club.

Present Use: Clubhouse.

Significance: Constructed by the H.C. Frick Coke Company during the late 1910s expansion of the company's coal properties in the Connellsville and Klondike districts, this building originally served as a bath and change house for miners who toiled in the Colonial mines and coke works. Controlled by the giant United States Steel Corporation, the Frick Coke Company undertook an ambitious "social welfare" program that included improved sanitation at its collieries and in its towns.

Historian: Gray Fitzsimons, 1994.

Project Information: The results of the study of Fayette County were published in 1990: Sarah Heald, editor, Fayette County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) and HABS/HAER, National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

HISTORY

Located along Redstone Creek, northeast of Uniontown, the coal town of Smock was developed in the mid 1880s, soon after the completion of a branch railroad of the Pittsburgh, McKeesport & Connellsville Railroad (PM & C). The PM & C was part of the Pennsylvania Railroad system and its branch line along Redstone Creek extended from Brownsville to Uniontown. The completion of this branch line accelerated the development of coal properties in the Klondike coal region, which encompassed the northwestern section of Fayette County along the Monongahela River and its adjacent tributaries.

Named for the farmer who owned the property on which the town of Smock was built, this coal-mining community contained a number of miners' dwellings by the late 1880s, following the opening of a mine by the J.D. Boyd & Company of Uniontown. In 1888, Boyd & Company employed forty-six men and boys whose production of coal amounted to 34.5 million tons. Boyd also operated a second, though smaller, mine at Smock and throughout the 1890s these two mines employed around seventy-five workers. The tonnage of coal production rose steadily through the 1890s, amounting to 94.6 million tons by 1897. Another coal concern, the Cleveland-based Warner Coal Company, opened the nearby Hurst mine in the mid 1890s. In 1899, however, the newly formed, well-capitalized Pittsburgh Coal Company acquired a number of properties along Redstone Creek, including those of Boyd and Warner. Among the largest coal producers in the nation, the Pittsburgh Coal Company's operations in the vicinity of Smock encompassed the Smock, Hurst, Eleanor, Grindstone, and Hanna mines. Of these mines operating at the time of the Pittsburgh Coal acquisition, only the Grindstone contained a coke works. This works amounted to a mere thirty-one beehive ovens. In all, the five mines and coke plant employed about 280 workers who produced around 200 tons of coal each year in the early 1900s.

At about the same time Pittsburgh Coal acquired the coal properties along Redstone Creek, W.H. Warner of the Warner Coal Company formed the Colonial Coke Company and opened a new mine in Smock, called the Colonial mine. This operation included a beehive coke works containing nearly 100 ovens. Joseph Baker of Smock served as superintendent of the Colonial mine and coke works, which employed ninety workers. By 1905, however, Warner's company was in financial trouble. Pittsburgh Coal, which was only sporadically working its mines at Smock at this time, proceeded to purchase Warner's Colonial property. The large coal concern quickly added two more Colonial mines. By 1910, Pittsburgh Coal was running Colonial mine Nos. 1, 3, and 4. The coke works at the No. 1 mine had been expanded to 500 beehive ovens and Nos. 3 and 4 had 156 and 300 beehive ovens.

respectively. Nearly 1,000 workers toiled at Pittsburgh Coal's Colonial operations.

In 1911, the H.C. Frick Coke Company acquired the Colonial properties of Pittsburgh Coal. Over the next eight years, Frick improved the mine structures and erected additional dwellings in the town of Smock. Although most of the mining structures at Smock are in ruins or have been demolished, the one significant surviving building associated with the Colonial mines is the brick and steel-constructed bath house. It was probably erected by the H.C. Frick Coke Company during the First World War. Under the control of the United States Steel Corporation, Frick Coke Company undertook a number of improvements in its numerous towns in the Connellsville and Klondike districts. The employee welfare programs of the fiercely anti-union Frick Coke included the upgrading of sewerage and sanitation in the company-owned towns and at its mines. This bath house is an example of such employee welfare programs which were aimed primarily at improving efficiency and safety in the mines. The bath house has served for many years as a club house of the local Franklin Rod and Gun Club.

Sources:

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